

# Teachers' Opinions about Building a Democratic Classroom

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The purpose of this study is to determine how to build a democratic classroom in terms of teachers' views. In this study, the qualitative research technique is applied. In addition, the semi-structured interview technique is used as a method of data collection. The data obtained are coded into Nvivo2 and then the following themes are established: democratic values, teacher duties, fair behavior demonstrations, ranges of personal freedom, and equality of opportunity. By means of this study, the teachers, who have adopted democratic values, will build democratic classrooms by demonstrating fair behaviors towards students, enlarging students' ranges of personal freedom, and providing them with equality of opportunity. The findings emerging from this research are discussed and recommendations are developed with regard to these results.

**Keywords:** Democratic Classroom, justice, equality, freedom.

One of the purposes of education given in public schools is to make individuals aware of their responsibilities towards their state and themselves, and to carry out these responsibilities. Students should be taught their constitutional rights of freedom and equality of opportunity, and justice should be provided while applying those rights. One of the places to teach individual rights and responsibilities is the public school, and the people to provide the instruction are teachers. Teachers should build classrooms where students' needs are met, and their rights are guaranteed in a safe and active learning environment. Such a place is surely a democratic classroom (Raywid, 1987).

There are many variables affecting the process of building a democratic classroom, since a democratic classroom is built by teachers, who attach importance to democratic values and display these values in their classrooms daily. During the process of building a democratic classroom that may take a long

time, the teachers should be in cooperation with the students. In their classrooms, these teachers especially should give students the opportunity to use their constitutional rights, treat all students equally, and apply classroom rules fairly to all students. For these reasons, the purpose of this study is to examine how to build a democratic environment, to determine the democratic values of a democratic teacher, and to decide how a democratic teacher provides the students with the main democratic values—freedom, equality, and justice—in a classroom application, according to teachers' views.

Democratic teachers should give importance to democratic values in their classrooms. Shechtman (2002) stated the democratic values or beliefs that a teacher should have are freedom, equality, and justice. Winfield and Manning (1992) enumerated democratic values or principles as autonomy, cooperation, shared decision-making, and a sense of community. Kınca and Işık (2003) enumerated the democratic values that take place in literature as equality, respect life, justice, freedom, honesty, the search for goodness, cooperation, self-esteem, tolerance, sensibility, responsibility, acceptance of difference, safety, peace, development, perfection, and effectiveness.

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One of the duties of teachers, who build a democratic classroom, is to create a positive education process for the students. Such an education process closely depends on an effective relationship constructed between the teacher and the students. In order to construct an effective relationship in the classroom, teachers should create a cooperative learning environment, respect the students, and motivate the students to achieve sufficiency in their social relations. Another duty of teachers, while building a democratic environment, is planning the class objectives with their students. Teachers should respect students' beliefs and values, and also the students should respect one another's beliefs and values. Teachers should increase students' cognitive and perceptive awareness levels by teaching them democratic values (Henderson, 2001). Seals (2006) states that making students feel they are valuable and supporting their autonomy is among the duties of a democratic teacher. Meeting the needs of the students is among the duties of a democratic teacher, as well. Glasser (1996) indicates these needs as belonging, power, freedom, and fun. If these needs are met by the teachers, students not only will be successful but also they will gain internal motivation (Erwin, 2003; Hardin, 2004).

In order to be able to build a democratic classroom, the teacher should apply freedom, equality, and justice—the main values of democracy—in the classroom. In a democratic classroom, freedom underlies democracy. And, the ranges of personal freedom include respecting a person's life, protection, fair trial, privacy, freedom of speech, religious freedom, and freedom to marry and set up a family (Aktan & Vural, 2003). Attaining these ranges of freedom should remain a desired objective (Tenekides, 1987). Teachers should instill upon the students the sense they are free and they have the right to express their ideas. Teachers should respect students' individual features and they should have the responsibility to help them sustain their features in the

classroom. Moreover, teachers should help students gain the knowledge of having the right to make a choice for themselves and they should teach students how to use this right (McEwen, 1994). In order to allow students more freedom, a democratic teacher should appreciate democratic values and adopt appropriate teaching methods where students can easily express their thoughts and ideas (Hepburn, 1983; Selvi, 2006).

We need to allow democracy to fully operate with all its components so that the spheres of freedom mentioned above can continue and expand, and, thus, allow individuals to enjoy equality and have faith in the equal opportunities offered them. A teacher who cares about equality in the classroom gives equal opportunity of education to each student, and in doing so, the teacher meets each student's education needs. Therefore, a democratic teacher gives equal opportunity to students in order all students can be successful. However, some students may need more help than others, special help; this special help should not mean inequality. This means that in order for all students to be successful, the needs of the students should be met, since equality does not mean treating all students in the same way. Equality means to meet the needs of all students (Gathercoal, 2001).

A teacher being fair to all students in the classroom is very important for the students. While establishing classroom rules, the teacher should encourage the students to participate in establishing the classroom rules as part of their rights. In addition, the teacher should apply those rules formed with the students to all students fairly. In the case of misbehavior, the teacher should not make a decision without listening to the explanation of the student first. Then the teacher should make a decision accordingly. Listening to the student and then giving a decision accordingly is a result of showing respect toward the student (Landau & Gathercoal, 2000).

The purpose of this study is to determine how to build a democratic classroom, accord-



ing to teachers' views. In order to realize this purpose, answers will be searched for the following questions:

1. What are the democratic values of a teacher who builds a democratic classroom?
2. What are the duties of a teacher who builds a democratic classroom?
3. What are the fair behaviors a teacher demonstrates in the classroom in order to build a democratic classroom?
4. What are the ranges of personal freedom a teacher allows students in the classroom to build a democratic classroom?
5. What is the equality of opportunity provided by a teacher to build a democratic classroom?

#### Method

##### *Research Approach*

In this study, the technique of qualitative research is used. This study has the following features: a) an integrative approach, b) flexibility in the research pattern, c) an inductive analysis, d) sensitivity to natural environment, and e) perception provision with researchers with a participatory role (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Qualitative research especially emphasizes qualitative technical meanings, definitions, and experiences. Most of the data will consist of words people define and observe (Coolican, 1992). The qualitative approach is used in this study in order to obtain a deeper knowledge on building a democratic classroom (Drever, 1997). Additionally, the case study method is used in this study (Merriam, 1988). The teachers who build a democratic classroom are those who apply democratic classroom methods in their classrooms, so the case study method chosen for the study is applied to these teachers.

##### *Study Group*

In this research, purposeful sampling

is employed. Purposeful sampling methods properly appear in the process of qualitative research. They enable the researcher to study information-rich cases in depth. The individuals who participate in purposeful sampling are chosen according to certain criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The criterion for the 50 teachers chosen for this study is the application of democratic classroom discipline in their classrooms. In this study, interviews are conducted with teachers working in Meram, a district of Konya in Turkey, and lecturing 6th, 7th and 8th grade classrooms during the 2006-2007 academic school years. Each teacher is given a code name from T1(Teacher1) to T50(Teacher50) (see Table 1). The sample consists of 50 teachers—26 females and 24 males. Eleven of the 50 teachers are between the ages of 20–24, 29 between the ages of 25–29, 8 between the ages of 30–35, and 1 is 41 years old.

##### *Semi-Structured Interview Technique*

The technique of semi-structured interview was used to collect data for this research and related literature was reviewed. In order to ensure the validity of the semi-structured form after it was developed, five instructors, who completed their doctorates in educational sciences, reviewed it. Based on their comments, a semi structured application form was prepared in accordance with the opinions of these instructors. Next, pilot interviews were developed. After some improvements, the interview forms became ready for use.

The 50 teachers' interviews were recorded by audio recorders. These interviews were transferred to computers. Afterwards, they were redistributed to the teachers in case any teacher would like to delete or add anything. Some of the teachers made changes. Since giving direct quotations from the individuals and explaining the results in relation to these are important for the research's validity, the data were given directly to the participants to check the reliability (Wolcott, 1990).



### *Data Collection*

The principle of voluntarism was the pre-condition of participating in one-on-one interviews. The aim of this research and how the study would be carried out were clearly stated in semi-structured forms. In addition, it was emphasized that the identities of the participants would remain confidential. These sessions lasted between 30 to 45 minutes.

### *Data Analysis and Interpretation*

The collected data were analyzed via the content-analysis technique. The main process of the content analysis technique was to reach concepts and relations which could explain the data. The fundamental characteristic of the content analysis was to collect and organize similar data in a frame of certain concepts and themes by bringing together those that were related. For this reason, the collected data should first be conceptualized and then organized logically in accordance with the emerging concepts. Finally, themes explaining the data would be determined. Having been conceptualized, words, sentences, and paragraphs were coded in order to obtain the idea more clearly, while reading the data. Coding was completed within the boundaries of the researcher's purpose and interview issues. While coding, researchers benefited from Nvivo2, a qualitative data analysis program (Kuş, 2006). Themes and sub dimensions were expressed in percentages. Categories were used to analyze various meanings that a lower level category contained (Coolican, 1992). By qualitative research's nature, percentages were used for ordering and reporting opinions (see Table 1).

### *Findings*

How to build a democratic classroom was analyzed in accordance with the teachers' views. The findings were carried out considering the predetermined themes (democratic values, teacher duties, fair behavior demonstrations, ranges of freedom, and equality of opportunity). Later, the categories suitable for

these themes were determined. Teacher views related to these categories are given in Table 1. Below is a summary of the themes related to building a democratic classroom and the categories related to these themes.

#### *1. Themes of Democratic Values*

Seven categories are constituted, based on the values of the teacher, in order to build a democratic classroom. These include be fair, humanist, open to communication, consistent, equal, and open to innovations, and respect differences. The proportions of these values are pointed out by teachers as being fair 58%, being humanist 54%, being open to communication 54%, being consistent 40%, being equal 32%, being open to innovations 28%, and respecting differences 24% (see Table 1).

#### *2. Themes of Teacher Duties*

Seven categories are constituted, based on the duties of the teacher who builds a democratic classroom—shared decision-making, provide equality, effective communication, student-centered education, give importance to students, be fair, and express ideas freely. Teachers expressed their opinions about the teacher's duties, while a building democratic classroom. They include shared decision-making 54%, provide equality 38%, effective communication 32%, student-centered education 32%, give importance to students 16%, be fair 14%, and express ideas freely 12% (see Table 1).

#### *3. Themes of Fair Behavior Demonstrations*

Five categories are formed, based on the teachers' fair behavior demonstrations in order to build a democratic classroom. These are treating students equally, allowing students equal right for participation, sharing decision-making, showing love and respect, and giving information. Teachers expressed their opinions about the demonstrations of fair behavior as given in the following proportions: treating students equally 54%, allowing



Table 1  
*Teachers' Opinions about Building Democratic Classroom*

Themes	Categories	No. of Teachers who agree with category (n:50)	% of participants in this category	Examples from Teachers' Opinions
Democratic Values	Being Fair	29	58	"Teachers should change their views according to the conditions" (the opinion of T1)
	Being Humanist	27	54	"Showing love and respect to individuals is the most important criterion for me. If individuals show love and respect to each other, misbehaviors do not emerge." (the opinion of T27)
	Being Open to Communication	27	54	"Being emphatic, having good communication skills, and being enthusiastic about establishing communication with students" (the opinion of T37)
	Being Consistent	20	40	"A teacher should be an example for students by applying democracy in his/her own life" (the opinion of T23)
	Being Equal	16	32	"the one who can behave according to the principle of equality" (the opinion of T36)
	Being Open to Innovations	14	28	"Teacher should always renew his/herself, since a teacher who does not renew him/herself cannot be democratic" (the opinion of T41)
	Showing Respect to Difference	14	24	"Respect towards difference among individuals and different views" (the opinion of T32)
	Shared Decision Making	27	54	"Students should be allowed to express their ideas about the social club they want to participate in and with whom they want to sit. They should have the right to select the chairman of the class besides being asked where they want to sit and to which group they want to join" (the opinion of T42)
	Providing Equality	19	38	"I see all my students equal in terms of material and spiritual. The first thing to be considered is that the student is a human being regardless of his/her race, gender, belief, idea and the way s/he is brought up" (the opinion of T26)
	Effective Communication	16	32	"A classroom environment where effective listening and 1-messages are used and the criticisms are addressed to behaviors, not personality should be provided (the opinion of T31)
Teacher Duties	Student-centered education	16	32	"Students should be asked how to do lessons, which methods should be used in order to enhance learning, and the lessons should be done according to the answers obtained" (the opinion of T45)
	Giving Importance	8	16	"Teachers should demonstrate behaviors and attitudes which give the students the sense that they are valuable" (the opinion of T44)
	Treating Justly	7	14	"If we have rewarded a student for a certain behavior s/he demonstrated, we should reward the other student who demonstrated the same behavior, as well" (the opinion of T16)
	Expressing ideas freely	6	12	"The freedom of thought and expression should be cared" (the opinion of T50)
	Treating Students Equally	27	54	"I treat all students equally while doing my lesson and give equal chance for participation" (the opinion of T33)
	Providing equal opportunity of participation	17	34	"I provide my students with equal opportunity of participation" (the opinion of T39)
	Shared Decision Making	16	32	"We give decisions altogether. We try to solve problems by forming discipline committees" (the opinion of T34)
	Showing Love and Respect	E2, F1, I, J, K, O1, P, S1, Y1	18	"I try to set a fully respectful environment based on love" (the opinion of T32)
	Giving Information	3	6	"I give information about why the groups are formed while doing group work" (the opinion of T25)
	Expressing Ideas and Feelings	24	48	"I encourage my students to talk about every issue, no matter it is right or wrong, in order to make them feel free in the classroom" (the opinion of T44)
The Range of Freedom	Positive Freedom	14	28	"I offer my students freedom for physical and oral activities on condition not disturbing the others" (the opinion of T77)
	Student-centered education	8	16	"I apply student-centered activities, I activate students via classroom discussions and project tasks, and I make them participate in the lesson by directing them questions" (the opinion of T39)
	Establishing Rules Together	4	8	"I allow to determine classroom rules and have more rights to speak" (the opinion of T20)
	Treating Students Equally	25	50	"I provide equal time for everybody. I try to make all students participate in the lesson" (the opinion of T5)
	Activating Students	17	34	"The success of education is increased via any student's active participation and preparing projects when it is necessary" (the opinion of T26)
	Having the Right to Select	9	18	"I use democratic methods in chairperson selection or educational branch selections" (the opinion of T35)
	Providing Education According to the Individual Differences	8	16	"I try to find out students' individual differences" (the opinion of T33)
	Encouraging	5	10	"I encourage my students to express their ideas and feelings" (the opinion of T1)
Equality of Opportunity				



students equal rights for participation 34%, sharing decision-making 32%, showing love and respect 18%, and giving information 6% (see Table 1).

#### *4. Themes of Ranges of Freedom*

There are four categories related to ranges of freedom provided in the classroom by teachers who build a democratic classroom. These are express ideas, positive freedom, student-centered education, and determine rules all together. The teachers pointed out their views on ranges of freedom as express ideas 48%, positive freedom 28%, student-centered education 16%, and determine rules together 8% in order to build a democratic classroom (see Table 1).

#### *5. Themes of Equality of Opportunity*

There are five categories formed, based on the equality of opportunity provided by teachers who build a democratic classroom. These are equal treatment, activating students, provide the right to chose, provide education according to individual differences, and motivation. The teachers stated their ideas about providing students with equality of opportunity as equal treatment 50%, activating students 34%, provide the right to chose 18%, provide education according to the individual differences 16%, and motivation 10% (see Table 1).

#### *Discussion and Suggestions*

This study indicates that democratic classrooms should be built by teachers, who adopted democratic values, and these teachers, in their classrooms, should treat students fairly, enlarge their ranges of freedom, and offer them equality of opportunity. From the themes obtained from this study some categories related to teachers' providing equality, treating students fairly, and enlarging their ranges of freedom emerged. The emergence of these categories is an important finding for this study, since it is necessary to determine the importance of justice, equality, and free-

dom, the basic principles of democracy, and the relation among them to build a democratic classroom. Using a different simile, these concepts are like a positive dual correlation; the range of freedom of the individuals in a society enlarges as they are provided with equality of opportunity and their rights are offered to them.

In a society, if equality of opportunity is considered, justice and honesty will increase parallel to this. Individuals feel freer as long as justice applications are applied neutrally and equally. So, teachers should treat students fairly and offer them equality of opportunity by enlarging the range of their freedoms, while building a democratic classroom (Kesici, 2006).

In this study, it is found that the teacher who builds a democratic classroom should attach importance to the democratic values of being fair, humanist, open to communication and innovations, consistent, demonstrate equality, and show respect to differences. These values are important in terms of students' having a sense of being valuable and providing an efficient learning process. As a democratic teacher, being fair is an important finding for democratic classroom applications. This finding from this study shows parallelism with Kelly's (1994) idea that the values of justice, equality, and freedom are important in the process of a democratic education. The teachers' responses indicated that it is necessary for a democratic teacher to have these values. This is important in terms of students feeling they are valuable and meeting the need to belong. If the student perceives him/herself valuable and a member of the classroom society, s/he will get used to his/her classmates more easily and participate in classroom activities voluntarily, as well. Teachers' responses also indicated it is critical for a teacher to adopt the value of being open to communication for both the teacher and the students. As Hardin (2004) stated, in order to establish communication with the students, the teacher should respect students, consider



their interests, and establish positive relations. Also, this relationship is mutual.

Consistency in the classroom is also a considerable democratic value. Selvi (2006) indicates that teachers' democratic values and behaviors affect democratic values and behaviors of the students, an important explanation in terms of the value of being consistent. The teacher who builds a democratic classroom should adopt the democratic value of equality. Teachers should take into consideration the students' needs and be equal, while establishing classroom rules and applying these rules.

The teachers who participated in this study stated that being open to innovations should be a value of democratic teachers. A teacher being open to innovations is an important issue for students in order to concentrate on the topic being taught. Such a teacher can involve students with the topic more easily. They stated also that a democratic teacher should respect difference. This is important in terms of teachers considering individual differences, while setting the learning environment. Korkmaz's (2007) research results emphasized the fact that teachers should pay attention to individual differences in order to enrich the learning environment, which supports the finding of this study.

The teacher is the key factor in the process of building a democratic classroom, because the teacher is the one organizing the relationships in the classroom, setting rules, and preparing educational and learning activities. In this study, it is found that the teacher who builds a democratic classroom has a duty to provide shared decision-making, equality, and effective communication, establish student-centered education, give importance to the students, treat students fairly, and allow students to express their ideas freely. In order to build a democratic classroom, the decisions should be made by the students and the teacher. Gathercoal and Nimmo's (1996) view, emphasizing the importance of shared decision-making, backs

up the findings of this study (Gathercoal & Nimmo, 1996 in Grandmont, 2003).

Another mission of a teacher who builds a democratic classroom is to provide the students with equality. Providing equality should include both the learning process and classroom activities. Also, the teacher should consider equality, while establishing classroom rules. The equality provided by the teacher with the aim of building a democratic classroom is significant in order to meet the needs of the students (except the ones who need special help) equally and allow students to benefit from offered educational service equally.

The teacher who builds a democratic classroom should create an effective communication environment. The finding of this study is supported by the idea (Kibler, Rush, & Sweeney, 1985) that an effective communication established between the teacher and the students is important for a positive learning process. A healthy communication established between the teacher and the student not only increases a student's educational success, but also allows a safe environment for him/her (Kohn, 1997).

One of the significant findings of this research is that the teacher who builds a democratic classroom should offer student-centered education. The view of Martin and Baldwin (1996) points out that the differences among individuals are important in student-centered education and an appropriate student-centered education environment should be provided for individuals, which upholds the findings of this research.

Another duty of the teacher who builds a democratic classroom is to give importance to the students. Giving importance to the students meets their need of belonging, contributes to the development of self-confidence, and allows them to discover themselves. Erwin (2003) claims that students feel a sense of being valuable, if the teacher meets their need of belonging, which backs up the findings of this study. Student's belonging to the



classroom is an indication of the fact that s/he is accepted by his/her friends and the teacher. This finding is supported by Gandmont's (2003) idea, which underlines that classroom activities give students responsibility and this leads to the feeling of being valuable in a democratic classroom.

Another key point in building a democratic classroom is treating students fairly. In this study, it is very noteworthy that only a few teachers indicated views on this category. It was expected that most of the teachers' views would be in favor of treating students fairly, because justice is one of the three basic principles (justice, equality, and freedom) of democracy. In order to build a democratic classroom, teachers should allow students to express their thoughts freely. For this purpose, the teachers should provide an environment in which students can behave freely, express their feelings and ideas without restricting one another's range of individual freedoms.

The teacher should be fair while carrying out classroom activities in order to build a democratic classroom. When the teacher treats students fairly, students adopt democratic values and attitudes, and they may demonstrate these values and attitudes, as well. In this study, the teachers expressed their opinions related to treating students fairly in the classroom as treating students equally, providing them with equal opportunity of participation, sharing decision-making, showing love and respect, and giving information. Teachers underlined "treating students equally" and "providing them with equal opportunity of participation" as demonstrating fair behaviors in the classroom. While carrying out teaching activities in the classroom, teachers should offer students equal opportunity to participate in activities and to make use of the learning-teaching process. Teachers pointed out that "shared decision-making" is also necessary for establishing justice in the classroom. This category and the category having the same title under the theme of teacher duties are the same. Aydın's

(1998) idea that the shared decision-making process is one of the main principles of democratic management upholds the finding of this study, because teachers consider shared decision-making as fair behavior. Moreover, shared decision-making is significant in terms of giving students responsibility.

Another finding related to fair behavior demonstrations by teachers, who build a democratic classroom is showing students love and respect. Teachers might appreciate the students and be sensitive in order to be fair. They might also respect students since they are individuals and they might make more effort in order to meet their needs. This effort causes students to feel a sense of being valuable. Schaps and Solomon's (1990) idea that if the students feel themselves as a valuable member of the school, the school becomes more effective in providing them intellectual, social, and moral development, which backs up a finding of this study.

It is necessary for the teacher to provide the students with information in order to build a democratic classroom. While organizing teaching activities, the teacher should explain to the students the purpose of the activity, how to do it, and what to achieve from that activity (Hoşgörür, 2002). A classroom becomes democratic as the students feel free to think, be creative, and conduct open discussions. Erwin (2003) defines freedom as an individual's opportunity to go wherever s/he wants, to say whatever s/he wants, to be with whoever s/he wants, to have an appropriate atmosphere in order to realize his/her interests, and to choose the occupation that s/he wants. Teachers should widen the range of freedom in their classrooms. In this study, the respondents pointed out that teachers should allow students to express their ideas, offer them a positive freedom, do student-oriented teaching, and allow students to participate in setting classroom rules in order to make the students feel free in the classroom. The teachers' indicated that students are free when they express



their ideas, which is an important finding in this study. An individual realizes him/herself when s/he expresses his/her thoughts. For a democratic classroom, teachers should provide students with the opportunity of positive freedom. Landau and Gathercoal's (2000) view, emphasizing that Judicious Discipline is a necessity for students to feel safe, to be protected against dangers and to show respect to other students, upholds the finding of this study. Also, Grandmont (2003) stresses in his explanation that in Judicious Discipline, student rights are guaranteed by the constitution and these rights urge students to respect one another's range of freedom. Similarly, Landau and Gathercoal (2000) explain that Judicious Discipline provides students with the opportunity to make use of their own rights and responsibilities, besides creating a peaceful school climate, which allows other students a safe, healthy, and comfortable classroom. Both of these views support the finding of this study and are related to the positive discipline category.

It is an impressive finding that less than 20% of the teachers mentioned the "student-centered education" category in order to build a democratic classroom, since it is expected that most of the teachers stress "student-centered education," which provides a broader range of freedom for students. Akos, Cockman and Strickland (2007) state that student-centered education establishes the dynamics of the classroom and communication. With a similar explanation, Kasanda et al., (2005) point out that student-centered education enables students to benefit from their interests, existing knowledge, and abilities. Likewise, Hoşgörür (2002) sees student-centered education as a process in which a student has an active role, and he thinks that such an education process allows the student to participate in classroom activities and take responsibility. These three views support the findings of this study. Student-centered education, which is not only a duty of the teachers, should be applied by the teachers in order to allow students

freedom. This has a significant importance in terms of providing internal motivation, setting a safe and pleasurable classroom environment, and allowing students to gain a sense of responsibility.

Only a small number of the teachers commented on shared decision-making. Such a result is interesting in terms of the findings of this study because it would be better obtain a higher proportion for this category for the fulfillment of democratic achievements, which are gained by students in a democratic classroom. The aims of shared decision-making are to allow students to set rules, which they should obey in the classroom, and to make them have the responsibility of obeying these rules which they set. Because few teachers agreed on such an important category for building a democratic classroom, it is thought provoking. Constructing classroom rules together provides students with the chance of setting the rules they should obey and to check the students who obey or do not obey these rules. The three following views support the findings of this study. The first view is by Sönmez (2003). According to him, classroom rules should be established by the students in a free environment and students should be responsible for obeying and respecting these rules. The second view is by Landau and Gathercoal (2000). They underline there should be classroom meetings, while setting classroom rules. And the last view is by Hardin (2004). He suggests that in order to be a classroom rule, the offered rule should be approved by 75 % of the students.

In order to build a democratic classroom, teachers should offer students equality of opportunity. According to the findings obtained from this study, the respondents stated that teachers should offer each student equal opportunities related to some topics—treating equally, activating, providing the right to choose, providing an education considering individual differences, and encouragement. One-half of the respondents stated that teach-



ers should offer equal opportunity in order to build a democratic classroom. The themes of democratic values and teacher duties include the same category. This category resembles the category "providing students with equal opportunity of participation," which takes place under the theme of demonstrating fair behaviors in the classroom. This shows that the inseparable feature of a democratic classroom is equality—the teacher should be equal, adopt equality as a democratic value, and treat all individuals equally by providing equal opportunities in teaching activities and in the process of participation.

The teachers stated that in order to build a democratic classroom, students should be allowed to be active. Teachers, who build a democratic classroom, should motivate students with classroom learning tasks or in social activities that fit the interests and the abilities of each student. Marwood, McMuller, and Murray (1986) point out that with the help of the Learnball Program, a classroom management approach designed by Earl Bradley, students participate in lessons and classroom tasks, and noted there was a decrease in discipline problems, which upholds the findings of this study.

An interesting finding of this study is that less than 20% of the teachers stated the category, education according to individual differences. It was expected that more teachers would state this category, since individual differences are taken into consideration in democratic education and teachers organize teaching processes accordingly. The findings of this study are parallel to Sobel and Taylor's (2006) thought that classroom design and practices should be accomplished, while paying attention to students' wide range of diverse needs, abilities, and backgrounds. The teachers stated that students should be encouraged to participate in a democratic classroom. Teachers should allow all of the students to join in the learning process and

classroom tasks equally. In order to achieve this, teachers should encourage students, who are behind in the learning process and classroom activities, to catch up with the other students and they should help them if they are required to do so. The method to encourage students is to take their attention to the lesson, as Raywid (1987) points out.

Nowadays, teachers' efforts alone are not sufficient to build a democratic classroom; the ministry or department of education of the country should make some arrangements and get involved, too. Teachers, students, families, and the other individuals responsible for education should work cooperatively in order to build a democratic classroom. These explanations are closely related with the Turkish Education System and the individuals who work in this system. Building a democratic environment has both advantages and disadvantages in the Education System of Turkey. As advantages, teachers are enthusiastic about building a democratic classroom and they are always searching for new ways to achieve this (according to the views obtained from the interviews with the teachers). A disadvantage, is the Judicious Discipline (as it is in U.S.A), which diminishes the workload of the teacher, is absent in Turkey and extremely crowded classrooms do not allow teachers to carry out the classroom activities necessary for building a democratic classroom (the average number of the students is 50 or more). In order to build a democratic classroom, some differences should be made in the Turkish Education System; especially individual rights should be based on the constitutional principles, as it is in Judicious Discipline. Some rules, similar with health and safety, property loss and damage, legitimate educational purpose, and serious disruption, are compulsory for Judicious Discipline classroom management and should be established in the Turkish Education System.



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